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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 001029

FOR AF AND AF/S; ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA DEFLECTS ZIMBABWE, SEEKS SOUTH AFRICA AND
SADC TO PLAY BALL

REF: GABORONE 994

Classified By: DCM Philip R. Drouin; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Botswana's frustration over the political impasse in Zimbabwe is growing, and GOB MFA Permanent Secretary Outlule called in Ambassador Nolan and representatives of the UK, French, and EU Missions here late Friday afternoon November 21 for an update and to elicit our latest thinking on the way ahead for Zimbabwe. MFA Deputy PermSec George also sat in, as did DCM as notetaker. As a follow-on to the November 9 Extraordinary SADC Summit in Sandton, South Africa, the Politics and Defense Organ "troika" of Swaziland, Mozambique, and Angola had been tasked to investigate Zimbabwe's allegation that Botswana was hosting training camps for MDC dissidents. It's a "big lie" and a pure distraction, per Outlule, but transparent Botswana agreed to hear out/receive details on Zimbabwe's claim. A Zimbabwean delegation visited Gaborone November 20 (representatives of the GOB, Mozambique, and Angola were present, but not Swaziland), but they came without any "evidence." Instead, Zimbabwean reps invited all to get on their plane and return to Harare with them right then, so they could go and see and interview individuals there who purportedly had information on these clandestine camps. The GOB said "forget about it," seeking instead concrete information in writing and in advance. Again, all a pathetic ruse in Botswana's eyes. (The UK DCM noted that Harare is also alleging British complicity in this phantom training.)

¶2. (C) The (lack of) implementation of the September 15 power sharing agreement was also discussed, with the hang-up on the proposed co-management of GOZ Home Affairs a non-starter for the GOB, according to PermSec Outlule, who echoed President Khama's and Minister Skelemani's sentiments on this (reftel). ZANU-PF continues to try to muscle and intimidate both MDC factions, and SADC and the international community need to break up any ZANU-PF notion that it is supposed to be "the senior partner" in a post-September 15 GOZ. Khama will therefore travel to South Africa over this coming weekend (before his official visit to London next week) to appeal to President Motlanthe, in his capacity as SADC chair, that SADC should request new, internationally-sanctioned elections in Zimbabwe. Most SADC member states (and especially those with a "liberation struggle" lineage) have kowtowed to Mugabe on this and are opposed to a new round of voting, which they deem as costly and unnecessary. (Outlule sought our confirmation that Western governments would support and help pay for new elections.) If the SADC approach fails, then the GOB will likely ratchet it up to the AU and the UN, but doubts it will receive a receptive audience in Addis.

¶3. (C) Comment: PermSec Outlule hinted that Botswana, which has put up a strong stand on Zimbabwe but is becoming isolated in SADC, is running out of ideas on how to crack

this tough nut. He welcomed our suggestions. While the international community and the West can keep on or augment sanctions, a consensus emerged that South Africa is the key to the solution in Zimbabwe (not really news). They need to play ball and stand up to Mugabe more forcefully, and the GOB was encouraged that the SAG has withheld some assistance this week. Outlule and others seemed to feel that in all our meetings with South Africa, we need to impress upon Pretoria that a humanitarian crisis is about to explode right next door, with reports of sporadic and growing outbreaks of cholera that could spread to South Africa too, fueling a new rush of immigration and a possible xenophobic backlash in South Africa. Not a pretty picture over the next 6-12 months, just when the SAG PR machine is pitching South Africa as a great destination for international travelers to descend upon to attend the 2010 World Cup. FIFA in the past has already cast a wary eye on the specter of unrest in neighboring Zimbabwe, and what negative impact that might have on South Africa's hosting the games. Perhaps it is time to raise the stakes with some hardball "football diplomacy."

14. (C) We continue to encourage the GOB to hold the course, but it is getting lonely out here. We would welcome any thoughts from Washington which we might be able to share with our GOB and diplomatic counterparts in Gaborone on the tough road, and pitch, ahead on Zimbabwe. End Comment.

NOLAN